

# TRAIL & LANDSCAPE



*A Publication Concerned With  
Natural History and Conservation*

**The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club**

# TRAIL & LANDSCAPE

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# Welcome New Members

## Ottawa Area

Janet M. Barnes & Family  
Murray Colleen & Family  
Lynda Cronin  
James W. Cutting  
D. Jamieson Findlay  
Peggy A. Gray  
Barry Grow  
Michelle L. Hak Hepburn  
Bryan A. Halliday & Family  
Robin E. Hughes & Family  
Lambert Landa & Family  
Danielle D. Lefebvre  
Glennis M Lewis  
Donna M. Lindo  
Ed Owen  
Jim Rickards  
Jean Symes & Family  
Lynn Symonds & Family

## Gatineau Area

Roberto Ribeiro  
Scott Rosecrans & Family

Henry Steger  
Chair, Membership Committee  
November 2008

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# Conservation Matters

*Stan Rosenbaum*

## **Larose Forest**

Eighty years ago, about 18,000 acres of mostly sandy soil that is now Larose Forest had fallen victim to many failed attempts at farming and cultivation. This dismal situation was turned around when a federal government forester, Ferdinand Larose, planned and implemented a program of planting trees, especially red pines, which restored the land to a productive state. Since then, selective logging allowed many other tree species to emerge, and the forest has become a thriving ecosystem. Christine Hanrahan represents the OFNC on the United Counties of Prescott-Russell's Larose Forest advisory committee. Recent proposals being discussed at the advisory committee include possible control measures on invasive plants such as Buckthorn, and construction of picnic shelters and interpretive trails. Many local people, including some hunters, are calling for a ban on hunting within the forest. To mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the forest, Christine organized and coordinated a celebration which took place in the forest on September 27.

## **Ontario Nature Wind Turbine Policy**

Ontario Nature's proposed policy supports development of wind energy, as providing a clean and renewable source of energy, but includes this condition: "All wind energy projects should be subject to adaptive management approaches that monitor impacts on birds and bats and implement mitigative measures whenever excessive bird or bat mortality is found." The committee discussed this question: Once the turbine towers are operating, if there are mortality problems, what mitigative measures are possible? Evidently, some reports indicate that bird mortality rates caused by wind turbines are relatively small, and not comparable to that caused by illuminated tall buildings. Of course, one measure could be to shut the turbines down during bird migration, but that would impact their cost-effectiveness. Regarding bat mortality, researchers at the University of Calgary have identified this as due to a rapid drop in air pressure around the tips of the blades, causing damage to the lungs. These are important issues which deserve the attention of all Club members.

## **Ottawa Greenbelt**

Last July, the NCC initiated a review of the 1996 Greenbelt Master Plan, which is expected to take about two years. As mentioned in the last edition of *T&L*, the City at about the same time issued a White Paper entitled "Development in the

Greenbelt." We were dissatisfied with both the timing and obvious bias in the content of the White Paper, and even more so, with the City's online questionnaire. We invited OFNC members to let us know their views on the Greenbelt. Club members who had previously supplied an email address to the membership committee should have received an email message on September 8, presenting the committee's view on the White Paper, and urging members to present their thoughts on the Greenbelt to the City before the September 30 deadline. We also invited members to notify us that they had contacted the City, by sending a note to us at [greenbelt@ofnc.ca](mailto:greenbelt@ofnc.ca). A reminder was sent on September 22. As a result, 27 OFNC members (8% of those on the email list) informed us that they had expressed their views to the City. The conservation committee would like to thank those who responded. Whether or not you agreed with the Conservation Committee, you informed the City about your views, and let us know that you did this. We are also participating in the newly-formed Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region (GCCCR) and will inform you further on this in later editions of *T&L*, and on the web site.

#### **Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park**

The Ministry of Natural Resources is considering making changes to the regulations on hunting in Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park, possibly extending the bear hunting season to include early September and, among other things, allowing the hunting of Snapping Turtles. We previously hadn't noticed that some hunting had already been allowed. While we do not approve of any hunting within parks, we thought it would be more practical at this point to address the possible changes, rather than opposing all hunting there. At the time of writing this column, the committee is drafting a response to the Ministry. We are considering two types of objections: first, that hunting is a deterrent to non-hunters who would like to visit the park, so at least the season should not be even further extended; second, Snapping Turtle eggs and young suffer heavy predation. This makes for very low rates of reproductive success to adulthood, which is compensated by a long adult life span of up to 70 years. This delicate population balance can easily be upset if the low adult mortality rates in nature are increased by human activities such as road kill. Hunting would put further pressure on this species.

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# Turtles in a Perilous Time

*Matt Ellerbeck*

Turtles have proved that they are one of time's most successful survivors. They have been on this earth for well over 225 million years. This means that they were here long before the mammals, before the birds, and even before the dinosaurs. They have managed to survive throughout the ages, while countless other species have disappeared around them. Today however, the turtle is living in a perilous time. Around 70% of the world's turtle species are now listed as threatened or endangered.

For some turtles it is already too late. Several turtle species have already gone extinct. Many more are being pushed to the brink of extinction. For many people, the term endangered species conjures up images of exotic animals far from home. However, the decline of turtle populations can be seen all around the globe. This is both a despairing and unsettling fact as the turtles' current state is almost completely due to the actions of people! There are several different factors contributing to the endangerment of the world's turtles.

The biggest issue affecting turtles today is the loss and fragmentation of their natural habitat. Turtle habitats of all kinds are being degraded and destroyed at an alarming rate. Wetlands are drained, forests are destroyed, and waterfronts are developed. Turtles are literally losing their homes.

The increase of human activities and recreation on the water and on beaches also affects turtles and their nests in a negative way. Waterfront developments restrict turtles from prime basking and nesting sites. Contaminants and sewage run off from such developments can also cause harm. Pesticides, oils, chemicals, and industrial pollution may contaminate the habitats of turtles and their local prey items. When the turtles eat contaminated prey, they may become poisoned and die.

Waterfront developments may also cause water levels to rise which can drown turtle nests. Driving on beaches with cars and four-wheelers can destroy nests laid in the sand. Recreational activities on the water can also have devastating affects on turtles. They are being killed or severely injured when they are hit by boats or water vehicles.

Fishermen often kill turtles for fear that the reptiles prey heavily on game fish. Both freshwater and marine turtles are also often the victims of various kinds of fishing and shrimp nets. Although turtles are largely aquatic creatures, they still require

oxygen to breathe. When turtles become entangled in nets, they are unable to reach the surface for air and ultimately drown.

Where good habitat still exists, it is often altered by roads and highways. Countless turtles die while crossing roads looking for nest sites to lay their eggs. This is particularly detrimental to populations because not only does it lead to the death of a large portion of the breeding population, the female turtles, but the next generation is also lost when the eggs are destroyed. This can lead to local populations of turtle species becoming exterminated.

Even if the females successfully find nesting spots and lay their eggs, the baby turtles have a very minimal chance of reaching maturity. Nests are often destroyed by predators like raccoons and skunks. While human activities have had negative effects on turtles, they have helped increase these predators. The increase in human waste provides an unlimited food source for these nest raiders allowing their populations to grow. This surplus of predators takes a very heavy toll on turtle nests.

Turtles, including rare and endangered ones, also suffer from being harvested from the wild at an almost unfathomable rate. Turtles and their eggs are collected for the pet trade, food markets or to be used in traditional medicines. Sometimes the turtles and their eggs are captured right off nesting sites.

Certain turtles, especially the snapping turtles, are often the victims of direct killings by people. Many people believe snapping turtles are dangerous to swimmers and will kill them on sight. In truth, these turtles are not dangerous if left alone. Witnesses have observed people shooting turtles for "sport" and studies have shown that many times people will purposely hit turtles they encounter on roads.

When all the factors above are combined, it accounts for a massive amount of turtles being lost. These animals are extremely long-lived and it takes them many years to reach maturity. This makes it very hard for turtles to rebound from drastic population declines. Many turtle species are simply not equipped to deal with the many hurdles that people have created for them. Hundreds of species are unlikely to survive without assistance. If we do not take the time to take better care of our natural resources and to reverse our detrimental actions towards turtles, we could lose one of our oldest and most successful creatures. If this happens what hope do other species really have?



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# Citrine Forktail: a New Species for Ottawa (and Other Additions to the Ottawa-Gatineau Checklist)

*Ken Allison*

It never fails! Someone updates a checklist and then new species turn up!

A checklist of the dragonflies and damselflies of the Ottawa area was published in *Trail and Landscape* ten years ago (Bracken & Lewis 1998) and an update was done in 2008 (Bracken & Lewis 2008), which took into account the accumulated faunal and taxonomic changes over the intervening ten years. The updated list included 120 species of damselflies and dragonflies. Within just a couple of months of this most recent effort there have been three new additions, including a new species for Ottawa—Citrine Forktail.



*Figure 1. Male Citrine Forktail. Photo by Ruth Allison, September 20, 2008.*

On September 3, 2008, Paul Catling reported his discovery of over 100 Citrine Forktails (*Ischnura hastate*) in the Burnt Lands alvar near Almonte. This site is about 150 km north of the nearest previously known location in Canada (Figure 2) and north of the northernmost US locations in northeastern New York, Vermont and southern Maine (Lam 2004, Donnelly 2004, Blust 2005).

On September 5, Christina Lewis and Bob Bracken met with Paul and visited sites at the corner of March Rd. and Burnt Lands Rd., and at a temporary pool on the former DND property, now a Provincial Nature Reserve, off March Rd. They observed seven individuals, including two males and five females.

On September 20, while looking for late flying butterflies, Ken and David Allison found a single male Citrine Forktail in the Provincial Nature Reserve east of Golden Line Road (Figure 1).

The Citrine Forktail is one of the smallest damselflies in North America, measuring only 20-27 mm in length (Lam 2004). In spite of the small size, males are readily identified by the yellow colour, especially the unmarked yellow of the last three segments of the abdomen (Figure 1). The male also has a projecting spur on the upper side of segment 10 (the last segment). The stigma in the forewing is reddish, differing from the blackish stigma in the rear wing and is unique in that it is separated from the leading edge of the wing. Immature females are mostly orange, as are those of the locally abundant Eastern Forktail (*Ischnura verticalis*). However, female Citrine Forktails have the basal half of the abdomen mostly clear orange and with no black markings. Mature females are olive and black and can best be separated from the similarly coloured mature females of Eastern Forktail and Fragile Forktail (*Ischnura posita*), by their lack of conspicuous black shoulder stripes.

This tiny odonate is found in densely vegetated wetlands, typically comprised of graminoid species such as sedges (*Carex* spp.), spike-rushes (*Eleocharis* spp.) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.), ranging from pond and lake edges to seepages. The known distribution of Citrine Forktail in Canada has, until now, been restricted to southwestern Ontario, but it is widespread in North and South America, including the Caribbean, Bermuda and Galapagos Islands. It is also found in the Azores Islands in the mid-Atlantic (Cordero Rivera *et al.* 2005). The Azores population is unique among the Odonata of the world in being completely parthenogenetic, i.e. the population consists entirely of females that reproduce asexually. No males have ever been found on the Azores.

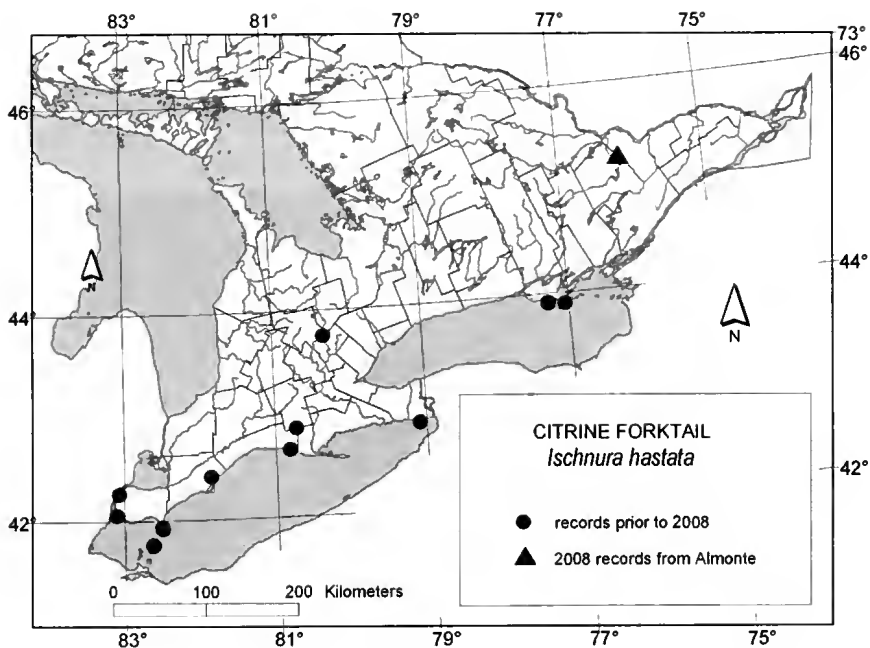


Figure 2. Distribution of *Ischnura hastata* in Ontario showing records prior to 2008 (dots) and 2008 records from Almonte (triangle). Prepared by Dr. Paul Catling.

While such exotic behaviour has not been noted in our part of the world, the range expansion of this species in Ontario has been quite interesting. It was first reported by Walker (1953) from two localities near the north shore of Lake Erie. Subsequently it was located in Elgin County in 1990, in Kent, Essex and Wellington Counties in 1999 (Oldham, 2000) and much further to the northeast, in Prince Edward County in 2000 (Bree 2001, 2002, 2005) and Presqu'île Provincial Park in Northumberland County (D. Shanahan – pers. comm. with Bracken and Lewis, August 12-19, 2008). It has been suggested that Citrine Forktail is responding to climate changes.

The discovery of *Ischnura hastata* brings the total of confirmed species of Odonata for the Ottawa-Gatineau checklist to 121. In the North American context this is a very impressive number for such a small geographical area (a 50 km radius from the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill).

In addition to this new discovery for Ottawa, updates to the most recent edition of the *Checklist of the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Ottawa-Gatineau* (Bracken & Lewis 2008) are as follows:

### **Sphagnum Sprite (*Nehalennia gracilis*)**

This species is a new addition to the checklist for the Ontario side of the 50 km circle, as well as a first record for Ottawa and eastern Ontario.

On June 16, 2008, Bob and Chris found five Sphagnum Sprites in sphagnum pools along the boardwalk in the Mer Bleue bog. They collected three specimens (two males and one female) which were presented to Paul Catling for the Canadian National Collection. They returned to the same location on June 29, and observed approximately 70 individuals. A note on this discovery has been submitted for publication in volume 10 of the Ontario Odonata Summary.

### **Spot-winged Glider (*Pantala hymenaea*)**

This species was not previously recorded from the Ontario side of the 50 km circle when the 2008 checklist was completed.

Christine Hanrahan relayed email correspondence (and a great photo!) from Gillian Mastromatteo about a dragonfly she discovered on July 27, 2008, resting in small trees south of the international airport. Gillian tentatively identified it as a Spot-winged Glider, and this identification was confirmed by Bob and Chris. Paul Catling also saw a few Spot-winged Gliders flying and ovipositing at one of the temporary pools in the Burnt Lands during the summer of 2008. He collected several nymphs which were identified as both Spot-winged Gliders and Wandering Gliders (*P. flavescens*). Paul, Bob and Chris did not see any *Pantala* species flying on September 5 when they were looking for Citrine Forktails.

**Note:** For local naturalists that are interested in damselflies and dragonflies, the new guide to the Odonates of Algonquin Provincial (Jones *et al.* 2008) is now available from the Friends of Algonquin Park. This very impressive book is well worth the price of \$28.95. I just got my copy and it has every species on the Ottawa list except for—you guessed it—Citrine Forktail. It does, however, include at least 15 other species that are found in adjacent parts of Ontario and Quebec.

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*Figure 3. Spot-winged Glider. Photo by Gillian Mastromatteo, July 27, 2008.*

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Bob Bracken and Christina Lewis provided additional information from their observations and many useful suggestions for improving this article, as well as passing on the new records for the two other species mentioned. Paul Catling generously provided detailed notes on his discovery, as well as a map showing the new range in Ontario, used in Figure 2.

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## T&L 20-year Index

Trail and Landscape's 20-year index is now available in two forms. If you would like an online version, then check the OFNC website at [www.ofnc.ca/tandl/20-year-index.pdf](http://www.ofnc.ca/tandl/20-year-index.pdf). If you prefer a paperless copy, then CDs are available for \$3 and may be found at the monthly meetings or may be ordered by contacting Karen McLachlan Hamilton at [hamilton@storm.ca](mailto:hamilton@storm.ca) (please put 20-year index in the subject line) or at 613-838-4943. Paper copies will be available, in a limited number, soon.

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# Muskrats at FWG

*Christine Hanrahan*



*Muskrat. Photo by C. Hanrahan.*

## **Introduction**

The first time I saw a muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), many years ago, I thought it was a young beaver (*Castor canadensis*). Even today a second look is sometimes required, for these two semi-aquatic species bear more than a passing resemblance to each other if seen when they are swimming, despite the significant size difference. Muskrats are very common right across Canada and can be found in almost any wetland, particularly cattail marshes.

At the FWG, a muskrat was first observed in our man-made pond some years ago. We didn't see another until 2005. This one was very active for the first few months, and could be seen sitting on mats of dried cattails, or heard rustling around in the shoreline vegetation. No doubt the muskrats found in subsequent years at FWG, were each seeking new territory and thought they had found a good place to call home.

## Habits

The muskrat spends most of its life in or near the water, particularly in cattail (*Typha* spp.) marshes, although it will inhabit almost any other wetland habitat provided the water is deep enough not to freeze to the bottom in winter, but not so deep that vegetation doesn't grow. It is generally accepted that about 1-2 m is a good depth.

Muskrats frequently make channels through the cattails, and in fact are quite adept at clearing large swathes of vegetation which in turn creates good habitat for other wildlife, such as waterfowl and various water birds. Even the muskrat lodges can benefit others. I've seen both mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) nesting on top of these structures.

The muskrat is really a large, semi-aquatic vole, not related to the beaver as is sometimes supposed. It weighs an average of 1.5 kg and measures up to about 62 cm including the tail. Despite its name, it is not a rat, but a rodent, and together with the musky discharge emitted from its anal glands, it is easy to see where the common name comes from. Like the beaver, muskrats have a rich chestnut brown waterproof coat and small ears close to the head. Also in common with beavers, they are well able to chew food underwater, because, as Banfield (1974) explains, they can close their lips behind their incisors which prevents water from getting into their mouth. You will often find beavers and muskrats sharing the same wetland or pond. About the only time muskrats travel any distance away from water is in the spring when they are seeking new territory, in the fall if their habitat dries out, or anytime their wetland is drained. Our muskrats at FWG are probably a result of spring or fall dispersal as those are the seasons when they are most visible at the garden.

Although very common, muskrats can be surprisingly difficult to see. This is largely because they are most active early and late in the day. It is also a reflection of their habitat which doesn't make for easy observation. However, if you are patient (or lucky) you should be able to observe them swimming and feeding, moving across mats of aquatic vegetation, or even trundling across dry land.

Apart from a sort of 'chittering' sound when they have been distressed by my presence, I have never heard any muskrat vocalizations, nor have I been able to find any descriptions apart from a vague mention of squeals and grunts when agitated or cornered.

Their biggest enemy is probably us. Not only do we kill countless numbers on the road, but we trap millions every year for their pelts. They also fall prey to a number of other species, although at the FWG their most serious predator would be dogs, foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), and possibly some of the large raptors that sometimes occur



there. I have heard that weasels (*Mustelidae*) and raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) will also take muskrats, and both these species occur at FWG, although in small numbers. Of course, in other areas of Ottawa, coyotes (*Canis latrans*) can be added to the list of predators, along with mink (*Mustela vison*).

### **Territory**

During most of the year, muskrats inhabit a fairly small territory, roughly 0.06 km. Population density varies considerably. Banfield (1974) gives anywhere from three



*FWG Pond in summer. Photo by C. Hanrahan.*

animals per 0.5 ha to three per 14 ha of wetland. As with so many rodents, populations are cyclical. Muskrats seem to reach their peak every 6-10, years after which, numbers crash. No particular reason is given but Forsyth (1985), probably correctly, assumes the cycle is related to food supply and water fluctuation. He also comments that the greater (10 year) cycle which typically occurs in the northern part of their range, is likely related to a shorter breeding season and slower growth rates, meaning it takes longer for northern animals to recover to their previous numbers.

At the FWG, we had never seen more than one muskrat at a time in our pond, until the spring of 2008 when a pair was found. They were very active for a couple of days, but after that we had only sporadic sightings of a single animal, and by mid-summer it was unclear whether the pond still had a resident muskrat or two, or none. As to whether they actually bred, or moved on to better prospects, I don't know for sure, but if they'd had young, our pond is small enough that we'd have eventually noticed them, and we didn't. Furthermore, as you will see below, the pond doesn't provide particularly good natal sites.



*Musk rats in FWG pond, spring 2008. Photo by C. Hanrahan.*

#### **Feeding habits**

Musk rats are especially partial to cattails which form a large part of their diet. They also consume a variety of other aquatic vegetation including but not limited to, sedges (*Carex* spp), arrowhead (*Sagittaria* spp.), and bur-reed (*Sparganium* spp.) all of which grow in and around the FWG pond.

At FWG, I've watched a muskrat busily feeding on the roots of the invasive flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*). For a short time I entertained hope that we'd found a way of ridding the pond of this fast-spreading plant while feeding local wildlife. However, the muskrat seemed to return to the more palatable cattails. Nonetheless, for some time after this first observation, I continued to see bits of *Butomus* floating on the pond surface which could have been the result of muskrat feeding. We also noticed pieces of cattails and other vegetation floating on the pond, as if the tasty parts had been eaten and the rest left to float away. Since this kind of thing is typical of muskrats, it probably was done by 'our' muskrat.

For a few years we'd watched cattails dying off in one section of the pond. Once we discovered the muskrat in residence we wondered if it had anything to do with this. We still don't know, but the area of cattail die-back was not far from the lodge.

Although primarily herbivores, it is reported that muskrats will eat animal matter. Opinion as to the importance of this type of food in its diet varies considerably. Most agree, however, that they will eat fresh-water mussels, frogs and other aquatic creatures when the opportunity arises.

If you've watched muskrats for any length of time around the region, you've probably noticed their 'feeding mats' or platforms. These look like large flat

bundles of vegetation, and are very strong, allowing the muskrat room to feed in comfort. Most of the ones I've seen have been close to vegetation, but I've seen a few floating around like tiny islands. I am quite certain that a good sized feeding mat was constructed near the west end of the pond, at least it certainly looked like those I've seen elsewhere. I occasionally saw the muskrat on it and it was also well used by both midland painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) and Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingi*) for sunning. Muskrats also make use of the previous year's cattails, which are often beaten down by winter snow, to form a relatively strong 'platform'.

### **Reproduction**

Muskrats give birth somewhere around mid-May to late June (Banfield 1974) and may have several litters per year, each with about 5-9 young. As with most wildlife species, many of the young die within a few weeks of birth, often falling prey to a wide range of predators.

Muskrats generally prefer to give birth in dens built into the bank and with underwater entrances. However, in places where this is not possible, they will use their winter lodge which they refurbish. I have seen muskrats gathering grass on the shores of wetlands in spring and then swimming off with long grassy tendrils hanging from their mouth, presumably destined for lining the den or the lodge, but possibly also being used as food.

Many people are surprised to discover that muskrats will use bank burrows but that is only because, being underwater they are largely invisible, and therefore not the familiar sight that lodges are. Sometimes, when water levels drop, you can see these bank burrows quite clearly. Of course, other creatures such as river otter (*Lutra canadensis*), mink (*Mustela vison*) and beaver also use bank burrows, so don't automatically assume they are the domain of muskrats, particularly if they are found in locations providing suitable habitat for any or all of these species.

There are a couple of burrows on the slope of the FWG pond, now mostly filled in. Whether they were used by muskrats is unclear, but I doubt it, as they are well above the water line, and would always have been so.

### **Winter**

Muskrats are active throughout the winter, but unlike many rodents they don't appear to stockpile food. Instead, they rely on being able to find enough to eat under the ice, where they search for submerged aquatic vegetation (Banfield 1974, Forsyth 1985). In the coldest weather they remain beneath the ice, using their 'push-ups' as feeding areas. On mild winter days you may see these animals out and about. The balmy start to winter in December 2006 encouraged a muskrat in the Dunrobin area

to wander about and feed on submerged grass. The water was open and flowing, and the animal was so busy eating that I was able to stand nearby and watch for 10 minutes without it being aware of my presence. A few days prior, in another area, I watched a muskrat walk along a water-filled ditch beside a dirt road, stopping every so often to investigate the cattails and grasses growing there.

A particular feature of muskrats in winter, is their creation of what is usually called a 'push-up'. This consists of an area of water cleared of ice at first freeze-up, covered with submerged vegetation to create a dome which, when frozen and snow covered, provides perfect insulation from the cold. Several times I thought I'd found one at FWG, but was never able to satisfactorily convince myself that is what it was. Some of these 'push-ups' are big enough to rival lodges in size.



At the FWG, there was a good sized, but well-hidden, muskrat lodge in the middle of the pond during 2005-2006.

*The muskrat lodge was located in the big clump of cattails in the centre of the photo. Photo by C. Hanrahan.* Typical of all muskrat

lodges that I've seen, this one was built of cattails and mud, heaped up to form a substantial mound. Elbroch (2003) describes the interior of a muskrat lodge. He says that they "usually have one entrance-exit, although larger lodges may have several. The entrance leads up to a small chamber created above the water level, where the muskrats congregate and huddle to stay warm. These lodges can be quite small, standing less than two feet (0.6 m) above the water level, or they can be quite large, holding several muskrats and standing 4 feet (1.2 m) above the water, with an ever wider base."

We are not entirely sure that the lodge at FWG was used throughout that winter. I did see a muskrat up until the weather got cold, and then again in early summer of the following year, 2006. But whether this was the same animal, I can't say. It certainly appeared as if the animal intended to remain all winter, hence the lodge. The water would be just about deep enough for this in winter despite the fluctuation in levels in late fall. By winter, the water level has usually risen again giving a depth of about 60-70 cm. Cattail growth is abundant and there would be no shortage of food. But, as far as I know, muskrats were not seen during that winter of 2005-2006. Over the next couple of years there were occasional muskrat sightings, including the two mentioned above in spring of 2008. We'll continue watching for these elusive, but engaging, little creatures, hoping to see one (or more) once again in 2009.

#### References:

- Banfield, A.W.F. 1974. *Mammals of Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 438 pp.  
Elbroch, Mark. 2003. *Mammal Tracks and Signs. A Guide to North American Species*. Stackpole Books, 779 pp.  
Forsyth, Adrian. 1985. *Mammals of the Canadian Wild*. Camden House, 351 pp.
- 

## Wind Shower

*Robert Nero*

Once again December winds  
have scattered willow leaves  
across the clean white snow . . .  
torn from our neighbours' tree  
long after we've put away rakes  
their dark sinuous shapes  
lie like swimming smelt  
schooling down the shovelled path  
or trapped in our dog's plunge holes . . .  
artful forms overlooked when fallen  
and blown on autumn's lawn;  
now sprinkled on top the snow  
these double-pointed leaves  
provide unexpected excitement.

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# Book Review: Lake of the Old Uncles

Karen McLachlan Hamilton

*Lake of the Old Uncles* is a biography of Ottawa resident Gerard Kenney. Gerard is the author of *Dangerous Passage* and *Ships of Wood and Men of Iron* and has been a contributor to *Harrowsmith* and *The Globe and Mail*.

The book begins with a brief history of his family, chronicling how his parents met, their move to New York City, then his and his mother's eventual return to St-Rémi, Québec.

Born in 1931, Gerard describes what it was like living in rural Québec during the Depression and through the Second World War. As a reader, you learn about the lives of the village inhabitants and how they survived those difficult years. You also get a sense of those care-free summer days he spent as a boy fishing and exploring the natural environs of the Laurentian Hills.

The book continues by recollecting some the "wild cabins" (or a cabin surrounded by trees which can only be reached by canoe or foot) he had encountered in his journeys. This section was interesting in that it described where the cabins were located and how they were constructed. Some were even appropriately illustrated. This theme continued later in the book when he described his experience in building a wild cabin in western Québec.

Another section dealt with the time when he bought a farm with the all important sugar shack, thus beginning his "nouveau pauvre" part of life. Here he talked about leaving the rat race of Ottawa to live at the base of Black Mountain. Life may have been simpler, but by no means easier.

*Lake of the Old Uncles* is full of local colour and folklore. Items such as his uncles' fishing techniques he learned when young will, I believe, provide a historical record long after it is gone from peoples' memories.

His passion for life and exploration is clearly evident in this easy to read volume. If you are an avid fisher or interested in local history, then you would probably enjoy this book. It is 196 pages long and divided into seven sections. It is published by Dundurn Press and sells for \$22.99.

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# Code of Conduct

## for birders, birdwatchers, and photographers

ALWAYS RESPECT WILDLIFE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND OTHER PEOPLE

Birdwatching and nature photography are becoming ever more popular. The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club's Birds Committee and the RA Photo Club Nature Group suggest the following guidelines so that disturbance to birds and other wildlife is minimized and so that all can enjoy the birds.

THE WELFARE OF THE BIRDS *MUST COME BEFORE OUR OWN INTERESTS.*

- Always remember: You are *not the only one* who may be observing.
- Always consider your impact on birds. They are most likely already under stress when MIGRATING, on NESTS or breeding sites, and FEEDING. Predatory birds (such as herons, hawks and especially owls) are also susceptible to stress.
- Keep a good distance away and do not linger. Imagine that a bird has "personal space" that should be respected. If you note any signs of agitation from the bird, move away immediately.
- Avoid flushing birds. If you are trying to attract a bird, be mindful of the hazards they may face. For example, avoid placing bird feeders close to windows or luring birds out to roads with heavy traffic.
- Use flash photography only with DISCRETION AND CAUTION. Nocturnal birds are particularly sensitive. Avoid repeatedly disturbing birds, especially those that have already been frequently photographed.
- Using recordings or imitating calls around birds on breeding territory may also cause undue stress at a very vulnerable time in their lives and should be avoided, and in general kept to a minimum.
- Do not announce the location of RARE breeding birds. Record details of your observations and consider submitting a report to the appropriate Records Committee (in Ontario—the Ontario Nest Records Scheme at the Royal Ontario Museum Tel: 416-586-5523; Fax: 416-586-5553).
- Stay away from active nests. Do not attempt to view or photograph nests with incubated eggs or hatchlings. Nests are very vulnerable and can easily fail if disturbed. Avoid gathering in large groups at nest sites, and do not linger at these sites.

- If **LEADING** a group (professional or amateur), ensure that members of your group know and understand the Code of Conduct. Lead by example. Professional tour companies must bear a special responsibility to place the welfare of the birds first, even if it means that rarities are not seen.
- Never disturb the environment, damage property, or leave garbage. Be quiet and respectful. Respect private property and always obtain landowner permission to enter. If asked to leave an area, do so immediately, and courteously.
- Stay on established trails. Don't block other peoples' views—this interferes with their right to see/enjoy the birds too. Never block laneways, roads, or any other form of access to other people.
- Always abide by rules and regulations in areas such as National or Provincial Parks, Regional or Local Conservation Areas, etc.

**IT'S UP TO *YOU* TO HELP PROMOTE RESPECT TOWARD THE WILDLIFE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND OTHER PEOPLE.**

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## When Pigeons Fly Like Falcons

*Robert Nero*

Strong wind blowing  
and cold enough to keep  
my parka hood up  
yet six pigeons seemingly immune  
to late January chill  
drift our way on steady course  
one bold bird right overhead  
lowered wings stiffly set  
like sharp fins  
remindful of coursing falcon  
so I'm musing . . . of course  
peregrines gained their prowess  
and keen lines  
in pursuit of swift pigeons



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# Coming Events

arranged by the Excursions & Lectures Committee.

For further information,  
call the Club number (613-722-3050).

*Times stated for excursions are departure times. Please arrive earlier; leaders start promptly. If you need a ride, don't hesitate to ask the leader. Restricted trips will be open to non-members only after the indicated deadlines.*

**ALL OUTINGS:** *Please bring a lunch on full-day trips and dress according to the weather forecast and activity. Binoculars and/or spotting scopes are essential on all birding trips. Unless otherwise stated, transportation will be by car pool.*

**REGISTERED BUS TRIPS:** *Make your reservation for Club bus excursions by sending a cheque or money order (Payable to The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club) to Box 35069, Westgate P.O., Ottawa, Ontario, K1Z 1A2, at least ten days in advance. Include your name, address, telephone number and the name of the outing. Your cooperation is appreciated by the Committee so that we do not have to wait to the last moment to decide whether a trip should be cancelled due to low registration. In order for the Club to offer a bus trip, we need just over 33 people to register. If fewer than 30 register, we have the option of cancelling the trip or increasing the cost. Such decisions must be done a week in advance so we encourage anyone who is interested in any bus trip to register as early as possible. We also wish to discourage postponing the actual payment of bus fees until the day of the event.*

**EVENTS AT THE CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE:** *The Club is grateful to the Museum for their cooperation, and thanks the Museum for the use of these excellent facilities. Monthly meetings are held in The Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor. Attendees may have to pay \$5 parking per vehicle.*

**BIRD STATUS LINE:** *Phone 613-860-9000 to learn of recent sightings or birding potential in the Ottawa area. To report recent sightings use the 613-860-9000 number and stay on the line. This service is run on behalf of the Birds Committee and is available to members and non-members.*

**Saturday  
3 January**

**DUNROBIN-BRECKENRIDGE CHRISTMAS BIRD  
COUNT**

If you missed the Ottawa-Gatineau Christmas Bird Count, or you had so much fun on that first count, then here is another opportunity to join in.

To participate please contact Bruce Di Labio at 613-839-4395 or email [bruce.dilabio@sympatico.ca](mailto:bruce.dilabio@sympatico.ca).

**Sunday  
11 January  
1:30 p.m.  
to  
3:30 p.m.**

**WINTER PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP**

**Leader:** Colin Freebury

**Location:** Fletcher Wildlife Garden Interpretation Centre, off Prince of Wales Drive, just south of the traffic circle.

This is an opportunity for OFNC members who are already familiar with how their camera works to learn more about shooting pictures outdoors in the winter. The workshop will include technical suggestions and an opportunity to share questions and information with other like-minded photographers. Weather permitting, there will be a practice session outdoors. Participants should bring one or two prints of winter scenes, either their own or from newspapers or magazines, which can serve as examples of potential problems or as models. Participation will be limited to the first twelve people who register with the Club number 613-722-3050.

**Tuesday  
13 January  
7:00 p.m.  
Review of  
Minutes**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**

**130<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, **Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.**

The Council for 2009 will be elected at this meeting. There will be a brief review of the activities in 2008 and a statement of the Club's finances will be given. This is an opportunity to meet most of the Club's executive and the chairs of the various committees. Find out what makes your club tick. Refreshments will be served.

**Attendees may have to pay \$5 parking per vehicle.**

**7:30 p.m.  
Meeting  
called to  
order**

**Saturday**

**17 January**

**12:00 noon**

### **BIRDING EAST OF OTTAWA**

**Leader:** Peter Hall

**Meet:** Costco on Cyrville Road. Park on the north side of the building facing Innes Road. The Innes Road exit is just past the split on Highway 417 as you head towards Montreal.

This is an afternoon outing to the Casselman area and other sites east of Ottawa. We hope to see Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, and other birds of open country. We will stay out until dusk to increase our odds of seeing Snowy Owls so plan to arrive back in Ottawa by about 6 p.m. If we have time, we will end our day along Earl Armstrong Road to look for the Short-eared Owls.

**Saturday**

**24 January**

**8:00 a.m.**

**to about**

**11:00 a.m.**

### **WINTER BIRDING**

**Leader:** Ken Allison

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, northeast corner of the parking lot, Richmond at Assaly Road near Pizza Pizza.

Ken will probably take participants to Britannia and from there will head west to look for finches, etc., but the exact route and locations will depend on where the birds are. Please dress very warmly and bringing a hot drink is recommended.

**Sunday**

**1 February**

**9:00 a.m.**

**to**

**3 p.m.**

**[Snow date**

**Sunday**

**8 February]**

### **ANIMAL TRACKING IN GATINEAU PARK**

**Leader:** Carolyn Callaghan, 819-456-3904 (coordinator Susan Howell, 613-820-9267)

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, northeast corner of the parking lot, Richmond at Assaly Road near Pizza Pizza (or be at the Gatineau Park Visitors Centre in Old Chelsea at 10 a.m.)

Join Carolyn on an outing as we look for, and may see, some of the tracks of the following species: weasel, deer, wolf, mice, pine martin, porcupine, squirrel, moose, and otter. She will give a short talk at the beginning before we travel by convoy to the destination. Bring a lunch and a thermos with a hot drink, and suitable clothing for the weather. While snow shoes are recommended, warm boots are an acceptable alternative for walking on the snow. Please bring your animal tracks field guide(s) to enrich your knowledge.

**Tuesday**  
**10 February**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Social**  
**& Club**  
**business**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**  
**FOREST MANAGEMENT IN ONTARIO**

**Speaker:** Linda Touzin

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, **Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.**

Linda is a Registered Professional Forester working with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Kemptville, as a District Forester. She will speak on forest management and what that encompasses. Her focus will be on how forest management considers the social, environmental and economic aspects of forests to ensure their long term health and use.

**Attendees may have to pay \$5 parking per vehicle.**

**Sunday**  
**15 February**  
**6:30 a.m.**

**AMHERST ISLAND BIRDING**

**Leader:** Jeff Skevington; trip coordinator Connie Clark (613-729-1815).

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, northeast corner of the parking lot, Richmond at Assaly Road near Pizza Pizza.

We will leave at 6:30 a.m. sharp. Please ensure that you have a full tank of gas and your morning coffee as we have left very little time to stop en route. It is 220 km from Lincoln Fields to the ferry dock, mostly on highways 416 and 401.

This is a full day outing to Amherst Island near Kingston. Bring a field lunch and expect to be home between 8 and 9 p.m. We will take the Millhaven ferry to the island (\$8 per car) at 9:30 a.m. and return to the mainland on the 5:00 p.m. ferry.

Participants can then head directly back to Ottawa or may choose to stop to eat dinner as a group somewhere near the 401 in Kingston. Amherst usually has excellent winter birding with a variety of ducks, land birds, hawks and owls. We hope to see Long-eared and Short-eared Owls, Northern Saw-whet Owls, Snowy Owls and possibly Great Horned, Barred and other birds. We should also see Bald Eagles and a good number of other diurnal raptors.

There are no open food stores or restaurants on the island and the walk into owl woods across open wind-swept fields is long and the snow can be deep. Come prepared with warm footwear, adequate clothing (hand and foot warmers are recommended) and enough food and hot beverages to get you comfortably through the day.

**Sunday**  
**22 February**  
**6:00 p.m.**

**MUDPUPPY NIGHT IN OXFORD MILLS**  
**Leader:** Fred Schueler (coordinator Fenja Brodo  
613-723-2054)

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, northeast corner of the parking lot, Richmond Road at Assaly Road.

Our destination will be the Brigadoon Restaurant at Oxford Mills. We shall follow the Leeds-Grenville County Road 18 south from Kemptville. Expected arrival time to be 7:00 p.m. Hot chocolate for kids and coffee and soup will be available for purchase at the restaurant. Fred will describe what we are about to see—the Mudpuppies and why they are subject of research at this time. Then we will head outside, across the road to the Mudpuppy site, the best Mudpuppy viewing in Ontario. This event is lots of fun for kids.

On most winter nights, 20-50 Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*) can be seen walking around actively in the clear shallow, often ice-covered water. The flat bedrock provides safe footing for viewing these giant aquatic salamanders. It can be very cold, so dress very warmly. Those with warm **rubber** boots may wish to bring them to step into the cold water, but much can still be seen from the shore. A strong flashlight is recommended. Please register with Fenja in case the trip is called off due to lack of mudpuppies or bad weather. [Note that Mudpuppy Night in Oxford Mills occurs every Friday through the winter and the public is always invited. Visit <http://pinicola.ca/mudpup.1.htm> throughout the season for regular updates]

**Saturday**  
**28 February**  
**8 a.m.**  
**to**  
**12:00 noon**

**WINTER BIRDS OF THE FARMLANDS**  
**Leader:** John Cartwright

**Meet:** Elmvale Shopping Centre near Kelsey's Restaurant, northeast corner, St. Laurent Blvd. and Smyth Rd.

We shall wander around the roads east of Ottawa where there may be wintering birds such as Snow Buntings, longspurs, Snowy Owls, Rough-legged Hawks, etc, and perhaps stop in at Mer Bleue.

**Tuesday**  
**10 March**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Social &**  
**Club**  
**business**

**7:30 p.m.**  
**Speaker**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**  
**EXPLORING OUR NATURAL WORLD**

**Speaker:** Tony Beck

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, **Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.**

Travel with Tony on an entertaining and informative trip to many wonderful places, highlighting some of his upcoming tours, including Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and tropical America, with of course, an emphasis on birds.

**Saturday**  
**21 March**  
**8:00 a.m.**

**LATE WINTER BIRDING**

**Leader:** Roy John

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, NE corner of parking lot, Richmond at Assaly Rd. near Pizza Pizza (or at Mud Lake at 8:15 a.m.)

Dress warmly for this morning's outing along the Ottawa River. We expect to see several interesting gulls, ducks, Snow Buntings and perhaps shrikes, if we are lucky.

**Sunday**  
**5 April**  
**1:30 p.m.**  
**to**  
**5:00 p.m.**

**THE FOSSIL COLLECTION AT THE CANADIAN**  
**MUSEUM OF NATURE NATURAL HERITAGE**  
**BUILDING**

**Leader:** Kieran Shepherd (coordinator Fenja Brodo, 613-723-2054).

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, NE corner of parking lot, Richmond at Assaly Rd. near Pizza Pizza or at 2:00 p.m. at 1740 Pink Rd., near Vanier Rd.

Kieran, Chief Collection Manager of Earth Sciences, invites us to see the fabulous Paleontological Collection at the CMN. The collection is very important for research and is too extensive for most of it to be on display. Kieran will give us a glimpse into some of the ongoing research projects and what is involved with the preservation and conservation of fossils. This trip is open to the first 20 people who register at the Club number (722-3050).

**Saturday**  
**11 April**  
**7:45 a.m.**

**BEGINNERS BIRD WALK FOR EARLY SPRING BIRDS**

**Leader:** Bev McBride

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre near the Pizza Pizza on Richmond Rd at 7:45 or at the Britannia Conservation area, where Cassel's Rd. meets the entrance to the Britannia Filtration Plant, at 8:00 a.m.

We will explore the area looking for early-arriving migrants and overwintering birds that are still here. As in previous years, we will focus on listening as well as seeing. We will attempt to move at a slow pace, catering to beginners.

**Tuesday  
14 April  
7:00 p.m.  
Social  
& Club  
business**

**7:30 p.m.  
Formal  
Program**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING  
BULLS, BEARS, BOGS, AND BITERS: THE NATURAL  
HISTORY OF ONTARIO'S BOREAL FOREST**

**Speaker:** Michael Runtz

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, *The Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor*. The largest part of Ontario lies in the northern ecoregion known as the Boreal Forest. To some, it is a vast expanse of black spruce and biting insects. While both elements certainly are present, our boreal forest also harbours an extremely diverse array of habitats that range from prairie meadows to subarctic shorelines, from fire-driven pine forests to floating beds of cattails. During several summers of field work in Ontario's north, Michael Runtz has documented a number of the special flora and fauna that make this region so remarkable.

**Attendees may have to pay \$5 parking per vehicle.**

**Saturday  
18 April**

**DERBY HILL HAWKWATCH**

**Leader:** Roy John

**Saturday  
6:00 a.m.  
to  
6:00 p.m.**

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, NE corner of the parking lot by Pizza Pizza. We will be leaving at 6 a.m. promptly.

More information will be in the next issue.

**Saturday  
25 April  
7:30 p.m.**

**OFNC SOIRÉE**

**Meet:** St. Basil's Church, off Maitland, just north of the Queensway.

The annual art and photography contest will be at the 2009 soirée. Macouners, your natural history projects are always welcomed and appreciated. See next issue for further details.

**DEADLINE:** *Material intended for the April- June issue must be in the editor's hands by February 1, 2009. Mail your manuscripts to:*

**Karen McLachlan Hamilton,**

**2980 Moodie Drive, Nepean, ON, K2J 4S7**

**H: (613) 838-4943; email: [hamilton@storm.ca](mailto:hamilton@storm.ca)**

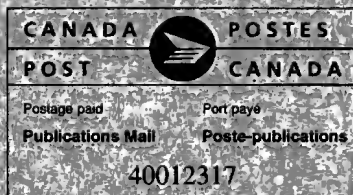
**ANY ARTICLES FOR TRAIL & LANDSCAPE?**

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